DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 105 923 JC 750 316

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TITLE A Proposal for an Occupational Information Center at Gaston College.
PUB DATE 28 Dec 74
NOTE 26p.; Practicum presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Employment Opportunities; Employment Qualifications; *Information Centers; Job Market; *Junior Colleges; Junior College Students; Occupational Guidance; *Occupational Information; Practicums; Questionnaires; *Student Needs; Student Opinion; Student Personnel Services

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practicum was to determine the need for an occupational information center at Gaston College (North Carolina). Many community college students have not selected their occupations, thus community college administrators must make a concerted effort to provide adequate occupational information for students facing this crucial decision. A questionnaire was administered to 100 transfer program students, several personal interviews were conducted for additional information and related literature was reviewed. The data disclosed that 49 percent of the students felt that the selection of an occupation was their most difficult problem. Though 59 percent had already selected an occupation, they indicated a desire for more information about the world of work, especially about job opportunities. While less than one-half of the students had sought occupational information at Gaston, 82 percent favored the establishment of an occupational information center. They indicated that they would use the center "occasionally" rather than "frequently" and that the best location for it would be the College Center. It was recommended that a committee of counselors and specialists be responsible for the occupational information center, which should be separate from the over-burdened guidance and counseling department. (RL)

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ED105923

A PROPOSAL FOR AN OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION CENTER AT GASTON COLLEGE

by

Dean H. Jones

Gaston College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

NOVA UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 28, 1974

JC 750 316

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational information has been defined by Norris, Zeran and Hatch in the following manner:

> Occupational information is valid and usable data about positions, jobs, and occupations, including duties, requirements for entrance, conditions of work, rewards offered, advancement pattern, existing and predicted supply of and demand for workers, and sources for further information.[1]

Lee E. Isaacson defines occupational information simply as "facts about jobs."[2] Occupational information is usually limited in meaning to materials pertaining to jobs themselves whereas the term "career information" encompasses both preparation and participation in work.[3] Occupational information is thus one segment of career information. This paper is primarily concerned with occupational information.

Occupational information includes data about the following items:

1. The labor force; size, composition, geographical factors, sex, racial, age distribution, major industrial groups.

2. The occupational structure and major occupational groups.

3. Work trends including labor supply, population changes, public demand for goods, technological changes.

4. Labor legislation.

5. Sources of information for studying occupations.

6. Classification of occupations and occupational information.

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[1] Bruce Shertzer and Shelley C. Stone, Fundamentals of Guidance (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 273.

[2] Lee E. Isaacson, Career Information in Counseling and Teaching (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966), p. 281.

[3] Ibid., p. 10.

7. Essential and critical occupations.

8. Duties of certain occupations, nature of work.

9. Qualifications necessary for employment in certain occupations.

10. Preparation needed for certain occupations.

11. Methods of entering occupations and methods of advancement.

12. Earnings and other rewards of certain occupations.

13. Conditions of work in certain occupations.

14. Criteria for evaluating occupational informational materials.

15. Typical places of employment.

16. Meaning of work.[4]

Certainly one of the most crucial decisions facing community college students is the selection of an occupation. It is evident among counselors and advisers that numerous students in the community college are still uncertain about which occupation to enter. As a result of this occupational uncertainty among students, community college administrators must make a concerted effort to provide adequate occupational information for students.

Occupational information is currently decentralized at Gaston College. The occupational information available to students is dispersed in various offices on campus. Some counselors possess more occupational information than others, depending upon their interest in this area. No counselor or faculty member is charged with the responsibility of "heading up" the college's program of information services. The problem resulting from this situation is that there is a total lack of coordination among student personnel workers with regard to occupational information services.

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[4]Shertzer, op. cit., pp. 273-274.

It is anticipated that this study will show that sufficient interest exists on the Gaston College campus for the creation of an occupational information center. Determining the existing need for an occupational information center in the minds of Gaston College students is the primary aim of this practicum. If the investigation indicates that there is ample need for an occupational information center, then perhaps its implementation will be expedited.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Someone has said that the three greatest problems or decisions confronting today's young people are selecting a mate, selecting a philosophy of life and selecting an occupation. There is no doubt among those employed in the helping professions that selecting an occupation remains one of the most frustrating and difficult problems facing contemporary youth. The choice of work determines, to a large extent, how time will be used, who will be chosen as friends, what attitudes and values will be adopted, where one resides, and what style of living will be adopted. The job gives identity to the individual.[5]

In connection with National Career Guidance Week, 1974, President Gerald R. Ford proclaimed:

> There is no greater responsibility than that of helping young Americans find their way to productive and personally rewarding jobs. As we observe National Career Guidance Week, I urge America's industry, labor and professional and community leaders to join with high schools and colleges in helping to make students better aware of the many careers that are available.

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[5]E. L. Tolbert, Counseling for Career Development (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), p. 1.

> The opportunities are there. What we need is a systematic way to assist our young people as they decide what to do with their adult lives. Guidance counselors in our high schools and colleges have a major part to play in this crucial task. But they cannot do it along. Designation of this week gives schools and communities a special incentive to enlist the help of successful men and women from all segments of society in introducing students to the many and varied careers they represent.
>
> There could not be a more worthwhile investment than this in the future of our country.[6]

According to a 1966 publication of the American Association of School Administrators, one of the major goals of education is to equip people for the world of work. Although the preparation of youth for employment is often mentioned as a cardinal goal of education, schools historically have not dealt with this objective in any realistic way. A constructive posture for education would be to recognize that work is a significant aspect of the total lives of people in this society and that it is society's right to expect that public educational institutions will help individuals develop realistic and satisfying attitudes toward this important part of their lives.[7]

U. S. Commissioner of Education Terrel H. Bell recently commented that there is an increasing number of students who are undecided about their careers. Bell explained that contemporary counselors are so burdened with the pressing problems of drugs and abortion that they have little time to counsel students regarding occupational choice. Counselors must involve themselves in putting out the fires of the day rather than aid students with their occupational decisions. This situation continues, Bell said, even though studies and surveys indicate the critical need

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[6] American Personnel and Guidance Association, Guidepost, Vol. 17, No. 6 (November 23, 1974), p. 1.

[7] Robert Lathrop, "The American Educational Structure," Vocational Guidance and Human Development, ed. Edwin L. Herr (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), pp. 181, 194.

of helping persons find meaningful work that offers opportunity for growth and fulfillment.[8]

Continuing this theme, Willard Wirtz, former secretary of labor and now president of the National Manpower Institute, recently referred to the present guidance and counseling programs as inadequate. Wirtz said that twenty years ago the family discontinued its traditional role of advising youth on career choice. He called on guidance and counseling personnel to take the lead in advising students about occupational choices.[9]

Despite the recognized importance of occupational guidance, educational institutions have not moved with rapidity in establishing innovative occupational guidance services for students. In the 1968 report of the Advisory Council on Vocational Education, strong concern was voiced for greater emphasis upon the world of work and its requirements in our schools. The council recommended an expanded concept of guidance and counseling to include services which facilitate occupational decision-making.[10] It is believed that an occupational information center will greatly aid occupational decision-making among students on the Gaston College campus.

There are probably at least ten good reasons why an occupational information center is needed at Gaston College.

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[8]American Personnel and Guidance Association, op. cit., pp. 1,3.

[9]Ibid., p. 6.

[10]Edwin L. Herr, "Manpower Policies, Vocational Guidance, and Career Development," Vocational Guidance in Human Development, ed. Edwin L. Herr (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), pp. 43-44.

1. There are not enough counselors to meet the needs of the growing student body. Even if students could obtain all the necessary information about occupations from counselors, there are only five counselors for twenty-five hundred students.

2. Students are still hesitant to seek help from counselors and other professionals. If an occupational information center were established, students would have complete freedom to brouse and explore occupational data without consulting a professional. An occupational information center would encourage student research and exploration into the world of work whereas now students often expect counselors to impart occupational information to them. An occupational information center would serve as an "occupational information bank" or "occupational information library."

3. Since counselors are responsible for other guidance services, they have tended to overlook occupational and vocational guidance as one of their expected responsibilities. Other counseling duties have minimized the importance of informational services. It must be admitted that to allow other guidance functions to take priority over occupational guidance may indicate disinterest among counselors in this area.

4. Individual counselors possess insufficient occupational information. Since career guidance is only one function of counselors, not enough time can be given to obtaining and maintaining occupational materials. In order to keep abreast of occupational materials, a counselor would need to devote almost his entire time to this work.

5. Individual counselors do not have enough space and facilities to house adequate occupational materials. There is barely enough room to seat two persons in a typical counselor's office much less a lot of occupational information.

6. Evening students do not have access to counselors as much as day students. Generally speaking, there are two counselors on duty for evening students, with one of the counselors not working every night. There were almost one-thousand evening students at Gaston College during the fall quarter, 1974. In addition to the scarcity of evening counselors, evening students are on campus for a shorter period of time than day students. Evening students would be more likely to brouse through an occupational information library than make and keep an appointment with a counselor in order to obtain occupational information.

7. Unless they have a special interest, individual counselors are unlikely to maintain up-to-date informational materials. Because change is an inevitable characteristic of today's world, there is a danger that occupational materials may be obsolete and unreliable.[11] Counselors, with their other duties, cannot keep up with the innumerable changes occuring in job opportunities and requirements.

8. Entering freshmen have not been exposed to adequate information about various occupations in secondary schools. Undoubtedly, this is one of the reasons there is so much uncertainty among college students concerning career choice. It has been reported that twenty percent of community college students are completely uncertain about an occupation, and fifty percent remain somewhat uncertain.[12]

9. Students are simply unaware of the multitudinous occupations available in today's world. One volume alone, the Occupational Outlook

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[11] Shertzer and Stone, op. cit., p. 278.

[12] Charles C. Collins, Junior College Student Personnel Programs: What They Are and What They Should Be (Washington: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1967), p. 11.

Handbook, provides information on work for over eight-hundred occupations. By 1985 employment in the United States will probably increase by as much as twenty million jobs.[13] Students' knowledge about available occupations is noticeably limited.

10. Students have grown to depend upon counselors to make occupational choices for them. There is a tendency for students to expect counselors to give them specific advice - "You ought to be a lawyer" or "Your test scores indicate that you could never be a doctor." The truth is that no counselor knows enough or ever will know enough to impart such specific advice.[14] Perhaps too much weight is now being placed upon the counselor's knowledge about occupational guidance and his ability to help a student make a logical and rational decision about career choice. The emphasis in occupational guidance today seems to be on what the counselor can do for the student. More responsibility should be placed on the student making his own decisions. Counseling students with regard to vocational decisions is still imperative, but the time has come for students to come to the counselor's office with some knowledge of the occupations in which they are interested. Students must share more in the awesome task of vocational choice. It is crucial for the community college to firmly set the responsibility for occupational choice with each of its students. To do otherwise denies him the excitement and joy of facing up to significant choice and also gives him

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[13] U. S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1975), prefatory note.

[14] John D. Krumboltz and Ronald D. Baker, "Behavioral Counseling for Vocational Decisions," Career Guidance for a New Age, ed. Henry Borow (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), pp. 238-240.

the easy but unhealthy escape of considering himself a helpless victim of "the establishment."[15] An occupational information center would encourage students to do things for themselves and increase their ability to make rational decisions.

Making decisions hardly ever occurs in isolation. An important element with which the person making decisions must deal is information. In fact, the decision-making process may be considered a strategy for acquiring and processing information.[16]

Information for career exploration is not information that shuts out the decision-making process by finding the student the vocation he should enter or the choice he should make. Quite the contrary, it is information that suggests to the student things about himself and occupations that he might want to examine in order to meet the choices that lie before him. Information is not critical by itself, but rather, in terms of the exploration it excites and stimulates.[17]

The significance of relevant occupational information cannot be overemphasized. Clarke, Gelatt and Levine stated that the possession of relevant information is a prerequisite for good educational and vocational decision-making. Relevant occupational information cannot guarantee that a realistic and rational decision will be made. Few good decisions can be made without it, however. The greater degree of pertinent occupational information possessed by the decision-maker,

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[15]U. S. Department of Labor, op. cit., p. 42.

[16]Martin R. Katz, "The Name and Nature of Vocational Guidance," Career Guidance for a New Age, ed. Henry Borow (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 92.

[17]Dale J. Prediger, "The Role of Assessment in Career Guidance," Vocational Guidance and Human Development, ed. Edwin L. Herr (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), pp. 331-335.

the greater the individual's chances of engaging in adequate decision-making. Hoppock and Novick felt so strongly about the necessity of relevant occupational information that they proposed the creation of the position of "occupational information consultant" in each educational institution in order to guarantee the existence of relevant and current information.[18]

Because locating relevant and useful information is such a problem, Magoon asserted that if someone from another planet could visit with a guidance counselor, this visitor would probably regard our occupational materials as classified information. This conclusion could be based on the following actualities: 1) there exists complex rituals and procedures through which a person must go in order to secure relevant material; and 2) the material itself is usually complex and insipid reading.[19]

Access is the key word with regard to informational services. The inaccessibility of occupational information is a serious problem for students at Gaston College. It is absolutely essential for students to know what is available and where to locate the needed information.[20] It is believed that an occupational information center would make information more accessible to students than does the current decentralized system.

A notable occupational information center is located at the Auburn Community College, Auburn, New York. It is staffed by one full-time

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[18]Bruce W. Bergland, "Career Planning: The Use of Sequential Evaluated Experience," Vocational Guidance and Human Development, ed. Edwin L. Herr (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), pp. 363-365.

[19]Ibid., p. 366.

[20]Tolbert, op. cit., p. 106.

Occupational Information Specialist and one part-time assistant. The center is strategically located on campus and is open from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. weekdays.

The Occupational Information Center at Auburn Community College is a resource center of occupational literature and other printed audio and visual aids designed for career planning. Users of the center may find information by browsing through occupational literature which is classified by the fifteen occupational clusters proposed by the U. S. Office of Education. Information is also available during "Career Focus Weeks" when various clusters of occupations are emphasized. One of the significant values of the Occupational Information Center at Auburn Community College is that it encourages "occupational shopping" among students.[21]

"Prevention is better than cure" is an old saying. Programs must be developed in the community college that will help students find direction and meaning for their lives. It is not an overstatement to say that the community college may be the "last chance" for many individuals in their quest for inner satisfaction and economic independence. Every possible program must be developed to assure the ultimate success of the community college student. An occupational information center may be just a small step in that direction.

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[21] John G. Battle, "The Community College Occupational Information Center as a Community Service Project," Journal of College Student Personnel, Vol. 15, No. 6 (November, 1974), p. 515.

PROCEDURES

In conducting the study, a questionnaire was formulated for the primary purpose of gathering specific data from students as to their opinions regarding the establishment of an occupational information center at Gaston College. Students were asked to respond to the following questionnaire:

1. The decision which has or continues to trouble you most:

   Check one:

   ____1) Choosing a marriage pardner

   ____2) Choosing an occupation

   ____3) Determining a philosophy of life

   ____4) Other (please specify)

2. The occupational information you received in secondary schools:

   Check one:

   ____1) Excellent

   ____2) Good

   ____3) Fair

   ____4) Poor

   ____5) Very poor

3. The source from which you have received the most helpful occupational information:

   Check one:

   ____1) Counselors

   ____2) Parents

   ____3) Workers in the field

   ____4) Self-study

   ____5) Other (please specify)

4. Have you already selected an occupation?

   Check one:

   ____1) Yes

   ____2) No

5. Is there more you would like to know about various occupations?

   Check one:

   ____1) Yes

   ____2) No

6. The area of occupational information in which you are most interested or need the most help:

   Check one:

   ____1) Requirements for employment

   ____2) Duties and responsibilities

   ____3) Salary and fringe benefits

   ____4) Advancement and promotion possibilities

   ____5) Existing and predicted supply of and demand for workers

   ____6) Other (please specify)

7. The present occupational informational service at Gaston College:

   Check one:

   ____1) Excellent

   ____2) Good

   ____3) Fair

   ____4) Poor

   ____5) Very poor

8. Have you sought occupational information at Gaston College?

   Check one:

   ____1) Yes

   ____2) No

9. Occupational information is currently decentralized (primarily housed in the offices of counselors) on the Gaston College campus. Would you prefer occupational information centralized (housed in one central area -- sort of an "occupational information bank") or decentralized as it is now?

   Check one:

   ____1) Centralized

   ____2) Decentralized

If you favor an occupational information center at Gaston College, please complete the remaining questions.

10. Where do you think would be the most appropriate location for an occupational information center?

    Check one:

    ____1) A counselor's office

    ____2) LRC

    ____3) The new college center

    ____4) Other (please specify)

11. Who should be responsible for the occupational information center?

    Check one:

    ____1) A librarian

    ____2) A counselor

    ____3) A Committee

    ____4) Other (please specify)

12. How often would you use the occupational information center?

Check one:

____1) Frequently

____2) Occasionally

____3) Never

____Male

____Female

____Freshman

____Sophomore

In addition to the information collected from the questionnaires, the writer discussed with students in more detail the pros and cons regarding an occupational information center. These informal discussions proved to be invaluable. Questions arose from these discussions which were not considered when the writer first proposed this study.

The initial goal was to invite at least fifty students to participate in the study. After conferring with several students and faculty members, the decision was made to increase the number of student participants to one-hundred in order to gain a more representative view of student opinion. Getting this many student volunteers turned out to be a lot more difficult than first anticipated due to student involvement in college activities and studies.

The study was limited to students enrolled in college transfer programs. Student participants were twenty-five male freshmen, twenty-five female freshmen, twenty-five male sophomores and twenty-five female sophomores. Students involved in the project were selected at random without regard to age, academic average, etc.

A careful review of related literature also proved to be invaluable in the development of the practicum. The Gaston College Learning Resources Center is supplied with an abundance of articles and books dealing with the subject of career and occupational information. Without the benefit of the related literature, this practicum would have been incomplete.

The rationale behind the procedures employed in the investigation was to determine the opinions and feelings of those individuals most affected by how occupational information is disseminated at Gaston College, namely, the students. It would be quite asinine for a college to make radical changes in such an area as informational services without first knowing the needs and wishes of the student body. The adage "look before you leap" perhaps best describes the rationale behind the procedures utilized in this study.

RESULTS

In the practicum proposal the writer stated:

> It is expected that the study will demonstrate that sufficient need exists at Gaston College for centralized occupational information service. It is expected that the investigation will indicate that a large number of Gaston College students are still undecided with regard to vocational selection. Moreover, the study will probably show that a central occupational information service will be more frequently utilized by students.

The investigation strongly corroborated these expectations. The major results of the study are summarized below.

1. Gaston College students confirmed that selecting an occupation was their most troublesome problem. Forty-nine students mentioned the selection of an occupation as their most difficult problem. Determining a philosophy of life was the most acute problem for thirty-four students.

Sixteen students listed choosing a marriage pardner as their most disturbing problem. Male and female students were almost equally divided in considering the selection of an occupation as their most vexing problem. Twenty-five female students and twenty-four male students named vocational choice as their greatest source of perplexity. As expected, more freshmen than sophomores cited occupational choice as their primary problem.

2. Students rated the occupational information they received in secondary schools as "fair." Forty-nine students considered it "fair"; twenty-seven students rated it "good"; seventeen students considered it "poor"; five students rated it "very poor." Only two students believed that the occupational information received in secondary schools was "superior." There was no appreciable difference among freshmen and sophomores and male and female students in how they rated occupational information in secondary schools.

3. Students indicated that most of the occupational information previously obtained had come through self-study. Thirty-nine students cited self-study as their primary source for occupational information; twenty-six mentioned counselors as the main source; eighteen mentioned workers in the field; thirteen named parents; four students referred to other sources, primarily instructors.

4. A majority of the students polled expressed certainty about which occupation they would enter. Of the one-hundred students participating in the survey, fifty-nine evidenced certainty about an occupation. Forty-one students, however, remained unsure. Between male and female students, females were more certain of an occupation with thirty-one having made this decision.

5. An overwhelming number of the students desired more information about various occupations. Eighty-two students wanted to know more about the world of work. There was still a great deal of interest concerning occupational information, even among those students who had selected an occupation. Students wanted more detailed information regarding occupations.

6. With the unemployment problem continuing to increase nationally, it was not surprising that students named existing and predicted supply of and demand for workers as the area of occupational information in which they were most interested or needed the most help. Thirty-eight students expressed most interest in this area. Twenty students wanted to know more about the duties and responsibilities of occupations, nineteen desired knowledge about employment requirements, and fifteen students preferred information dealing with advancement and promotion possibilities.

7. Students rated the present occupational information service at Gaston College as "good." Forty-five of the student respondents considered informational services at Gaston College "good," but only a "fair" rating was given by forty-four respondents. Of the forty-five students rating the informational services at Gaston College "good," twenty-eight were freshmen and seventeen were sophomores. The responses of the students clearly indicated a need for improvement in informational services at Gaston College.

8. Less than half of the respondents indicated that they had sought occupational information at Gaston College. Fifty-five percent of the students have never utilized informational services at Gaston College whereas forty-five percent have. More sophomores than freshmen have obtained occupational information.

9. An occupational information center was overwhelmingly preferred by the students participating in the study. Eighty-two of the one-hundred students favored centralized occupational information as the most effective means of reaching the greatest number of students with vital career data. This revelation substantiates the contention of many that current informational services at Gaston College are not accessible to a lot of students.

10. Of the eighty-two students who preferred an occupational information center, forty-three wanted it to be located in the college center which will soon be under construction. Twenty-four favored the Learning Resources Center for its location. Fifteen students suggested that the occupational information center be located in a counselor's office.

11. Students who favored an occupational information center recommended that a committee should be responsible for the centralized information service. Forty-six students preferred a committee for this task. It was suggested that the committee should be composed primarily of counselors and other specialized personnel. Thirty-four students suggested that a counselor should be in charge of the occupational information center.

12. Finally, as to probable frequency of use, fifty-four of the respondents who favored the centralization of informational services, indicated that they would make use of the occupational information center on an "occasion" basis (rather than "frequently" or "never"). Twenty-six of the students indicated that they would use the center "frequently." Only two of the respondents maintained that they would "never" use the occupational information center.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of this investigation, the following suggestions are made with regard to the proposed occupational information center.

Firstly, Gaston College should establish an occupational information center at the earliest possible date. There needs to be one source of occupational information to aid students in the exploration, planning and decision-making process. The community college can and should be a major resource for information about occupations, including trends, requirements for employment, duties and responsibilities, salary and fringe benefits, advancement and promotion possibilities, existing and predicted supply of and demand for workers.

The overwhelming majority of the students participating in this study support the establishment of an "occupational information bank." Where there is a central agency for accumulating and disseminating occupational information, there is less overlapping in services and fewer areas of opportunity which are overlooked.[22]

The occupational information center would not supplant the counselor's role in career guidance. It would have the opposite affect by supplying counselors with vital up-to-date occupational data which they do not ordinarily possess. Moreover, students would be better prepared for occupational counseling if they were equipped with some basic information concerning occupations.

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[22]Frank W. Miller, Guidance Principles and Services, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, Inc., 1961), p. 194.

Secondly, one person should be in charge of the occupational information center, preferably a suitable counselor. Coordination and efficiency are best achieved where one individual is responsible for informational services. Since occupational information falls under the jurisdiction of student personnel services, the dean of this division should appoint someone for this work on the basis of experience, interest and professional competence. The person selected for the position would be referred to as the Director of the Occupational Information Center.

An advisory committee consisting of faculty members and students would be selected for the purpose of making recommendations and suggestions to the person responsible for the occupational information center. The Director of the Occupational Information Center would be primarily responsible for acquiring, organizing, housing and disseminating prepared materials of an occupational nature.

Thirdly, the occupational information center should be located probably in the new college center. The location of the informational services is extremely important as it largely determines frequency of use. The new college center will be extensively used by students and would be an ideal location for the occupational information center.

What good is an education which fails to prepare students for life? The hard facts are that community college students currently are not getting the vocational and occupational information they need with which to make rational and realistic decisions concerning which occupation to enter. This pattern must end. The time has come for each community college to truly become the community's college. The community college cannot fulfill its obligation to the local community unless its graduates choose occupations for which they are suited and prepared. Because

this is true, every feasible program must be developed to assure the success of the community college student. The establishment of an occupational information center would be a step in the right direction for Gaston College.

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